



FACT SHEET

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Squadron Adoption Program

The Squadron Adoption Program is a unique and effective community relations effort. It is designed to promote understanding, appreciation, and an atmosphere of mutual friendship and cooperation between the people of Wichita Falls, Texas, surrounding communities, and their Air Force neighbors.

Its objective is simple: a workable program in which a military person, regardless of rank, race, creed or color, becomes an integral part of a neighboring community. In short, it is people of different walks of life working toward mutual understanding.

The program was originated in 1959 by retired Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Floyd Taylor. A resident of Wichita Falls, he was acutely aware of unstable relations, ranging from general apathy to open hostility, which had existed over a period of years between the base and community. His years of service in the Air Force convinced him that both the military and local citizens could function much better in an atmosphere of cooperation and understanding.

With that in mind, Colonel Taylor began the groundwork which led to the founding of the Squadron Adoption Program. His idea was to encourage prominent business and civic organizations in the Wichita Falls area to “adopt” a particular unit or squadron at Sheppard Air Force Base for closer personal contact between the civilians and military and to encourage better friendship, cooperation and understanding. Very few people thought it would work, but Colonel Taylor continued his efforts.

First, he approached military officials at Sheppard to obtain their support. Then he gained the backing of civic leaders and service organizations in Wichita Falls.

Colonel Taylor’s efforts were rewarded, when in April 1959, the Wichita Falls Rotary Club “adopted” the 3767th Student Squadron.

He was able to get 15 sponsors in 1959; 11 of those original sponsors were still in the program when it observed its 25th anniversary.

The Squadron Adoption Program served to quench smoldering negative attitudes of both the civilian and military communities in this area. As such it was taken as a model by the Rotary Club worldwide for local adaptation for the adoption of Sheppard’s field training detachments. The success of a venture is not always shown by “something.” Very often success is evident by “nothing.” Such is the case here — friction between the civilian and military communities is conspicuous by its absence.

The Honorable Graham Purcell cited the program and his remarks, printed in the Congressional Record (Sept. 27, 1961), read, "...through the combined efforts of the civic organizations and the military personnel of the Wichita Falls area, it has enhanced the desirability of being connected with that particular base and is thus reflected in the high morale of the Air Force personnel ... Out of the squadron adoption plan has developed a community-base relationship without equal."

After successfully heading the program for 14 years, Colonel Taylor, who retired from the Air Force in 1964, retired as program director and moved to Air Force Village in San Antonio, Texas. In recognition of his work with the Squadron Adoption Program, he was awarded the Air Force Exceptional Service Award.

James T. Montgomery II, a Wichita Falls attorney and rancher, assumed the directorship from Colonel Taylor in April 1973. Prior to that he had participated in the program through involvement with the First German Air Force Training Squadron, 80th Flying Training Wing. He gave freely of his time to provide counsel and guidance, and he personally monitored the program's many activities. He also maintained close liaison with the Sheppard Technical Training Center commander and his staff. His success was largely attributed to his ability to "sell" the program to adopters on a noncommercial basis. He was also successful in bringing organizations from Burkburnett and Iowa Park into the program. When the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Program was assigned to Sheppard, he was successful in securing individuals to sponsor each participating country.

Mr. Montgomery was awarded Germany's highest civilian honor, the Order of Merit, First Class, in 1972; the U.S. Air Force Exceptional Service Award in 1979; and the German armed forces highest civilian award, the Gold Cross of Honor, in 1982 for his involvement in the program. He was named a Sheppard Contributor in 1982.

Retired Air Force Col. Robert D. Haley became assistant program director in June 1983. On April 10, 1984, the 25th anniversary of the first "adoption," he became the third director when Mr. Montgomery retired. Under Colonel Haley's leadership, the program grew to over 40 squadrons/ENJJPT countries being adopted by over 50 local organizations/families.

After Colonel Haley's death in 2001, Tim Chase, president of the Wichita Falls Board of Commerce and Industry, assumed the role as director.

An objective of the program is to involve the maximum number of people. Therefore, functions include as many people as possible, to include a mixture of military members and adopters. Its ideal is to include all military personnel, from student airmen to the highest ranking officers. Program activities have included sightseeing trips, rodeos, community events, sports, recreational programs, and the familiar Texas "feed" or barbecue.

The Squadron Adoption Program has proved to be one of the most effective and successful means for developing friendship and goodwill between the local communities and the base. The grasp of a friendly hand is as firm and sure in the Squadron Adoption Program as is the increase in understanding and goodwill of individuals.